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Report of the Secretary-General on the deployment of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur

I. Introduction

1. The present report, which covers the period from January to March 2008, is submitted pursuant to paragraph 21 of Security Council resolution 1769 (2007), by which the Council requested me to report every 90 days on developments in Darfur, the progress made in the implementation of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and the status of the political process.

II. Ceasefire and the situation on the ground in Darfur

A. Security situation

2. The security situation in Darfur during the reporting period was extremely volatile, especially in the State of Western Darfur. Tensions between Chad and the Sudan reignited at the end of December 2007, when the rebel movement known as the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) initiated an offensive against the Sudanese Armed Forces in Western Darfur. During the hostilities, JEM took control of Seraf Jidad, Sirba and Seleia, which lie in the northern corridor of Western Darfur, and threatened to attack El Geneina. By mid-January 2008, the Sudanese Armed Forces had mobilized a large force, including attack aviation, and begun to retake positions under JEM control. On 12 and 24 January, the Sudanese Armed Forces attacked Seraf Jidad.

3. Approximately 115 fatalities were reported to the United Nations and humanitarian agencies during their visits to the area following the attack. On 8 and 9 February, the Sudanese Armed Forces moved north to attack Sirba and Seleia, pushing JEM back into Jebel Moon. The actions of JEM and the Sudanese Armed Forces displaced thousands of civilians, both within the Sudan and into Chad. By the end of the reporting period, the Sudanese Armed Forces were still engaging JEM and elements of the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) in and around Jebel Moon. On 19 March, JEM reportedly ambushed a Sudanese Armed Forces convoy 65 km north of El Geneina in Western Darfur, killing 19 Government soldiers. Reports during February and March documented numerous military Sudanese Armed Forces convoys moving from Southern and Northern Darfur towards El Geneina in Western Darfur.

4. Chadian armed opposition groups staged a failed offensive on N'Djamena on 29 January from their base in the area south of El Geneina. Following the attempt on N'Djamena, large numbers of Chadian armed groups are reported to have returned to Western Darfur to resupply. The possibility of another offensive into Chad cannot be dismissed.

5. Hostilities between rebel factions have also occurred during the reporting period. Heavy fighting was reported in Shurum, which lies 80 km south-east of Nyala in Southern Darfur, on 19 March between members of the SLM/A-Minni Minawi and SLM-Free Will factions. It was reported that nine people were killed during the fighting.

B. Attack on UNAMID convoy

6. UNAMID was challenged almost immediately following the transfer of authority from the African Union Mission in the Sudan (AMIS) on 31 December, when, on 7 January, the Sudanese Armed Forces fired on the first UNAMID resupply convoy, 2 km from Tine in Northern Darfur. A civilian driver was wounded when the fuel tanker he was driving was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade. The UNAMID convoy escort did not return fire.

7. At the direction of the UNAMID Force Commander, a review was carried out to investigate the causes of the attack. The review concluded that, although the convoy had been travelling after dark owing to delays caused by vehicle breakdowns, the attack had been unprovoked. UNAMID protested the attack and sought assurances from the Government that such an incident would not be repeated. The mission has continued to conduct resupply convoys in Darfur without incident.

C. Activities of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur

8. Despite facing difficulties in obtaining access to the areas affected by fighting during the reporting period, UNAMID has responded to the instability in Western Darfur by increasing its patrol presence in the northern corridor of the State, and plans have been adjusted to deploy a permanent contingent as soon as possible. Following a visit by the Joint Special Representative, the Deputy Force Commander and the Police Commissioner to Seleia on 26 February, military and police vehicle patrols originating from Kulbus and El Geneina have been conducted on a regular basis in the northern corridor of Western Darfur. Liaison is being maintained with the Sudanese Armed Forces in the region, and patrols have made some contact with the JEM leadership near Jebel Moon. On 19 March, the Deputy Joint Special Representative and the military Chief of Staff visited Seleia in order to explore options for deploying UNAMID in the area on a more permanent basis.

9. The situation in Western Darfur continues to be of great concern to UNAMID, and plans are under way to reinforce the Kulbus area with an additional platoon. UNAMID is also planning to deploy a minimum of one company (120 soldiers) with a police detachment (30 officers) into Seleia in order to provide a full-time presence, monitor and report on the activities of the Sudanese Armed Forces and

rebel movements, and facilitate the voluntary return of displaced civilians. Those plans are largely dependent on logistical support capabilities, including the time required to construct accommodations. The mission intends, as a more durable measure, to place a new battalion in two locations in Kulbus and a new camp in Seleia in the second half of 2008, so that its area of operations would cover the entire Jebel Moon area.

10. The mission has also taken measures to improve its defensive infrastructure. In particular, it has enhanced the physical perimeter of each deployment location by erecting berms and Hesco Bastion walls, raising observation towers, creating trench systems and illuminating base perimeters with floodlights. Additionally, the mission intends for all bases to be manned by at least a half battalion in order to improve force protection and make a higher percentage of forces available for proactive operations.

11. UNAMID has significantly increased its patrols throughout Darfur, which were virtually non-existent at the time of the transfer of authority. In January, UNAMID police implemented a three-phase plan for patrolling camps for internally displaced persons. Both the military and the police components have expanded confidence-building patrols, which now cover more than 80 per cent of such camps in Darfur. In addition, patrol times have been extended, and patrols are now undertaken daily between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. in nearly all locations. The objective of the enhanced patrolling is to build trust and confidence with the local actors and enhance cooperation and coordination between United Nations police and their Government and movement counterparts.

12. The Police Commissioner has identified continued proactive engagement with internally displaced persons, local communities and Government authorities as priority activities for the UNAMID police component. In that regard, he has put particular emphasis on undertaking 24-hour, 7-day patrols in camps for internally displaced persons across all three sectors and on bolstering police presence on the basis of the three-phase implementation plan. The mission is also undertaking the establishment of women's desks and community policing programmes in the camps. In that context, a Joint State Police Committee to combat crime and a Joint State Committee for combating violence against women and children were established in Southern Darfur in February. Those committees comprise representatives of UNAMID, United Nations agencies and the authorities of the Sudan. In its first press briefing, on 13 March, the UNAMID Public Information component was able to convey some of those positive developments to the national and international press while highlighting the ongoing challenges faced by UNAMID.

III. Humanitarian situation

13. The military operations by the Sudanese Armed Forces and militias in the northern corridor of Western Darfur during the first three months of 2008 caused dozens of civilian fatalities and the displacement of an estimated 60,000 individuals. Damage to civilian installations such as clinics, water points, homes and other infrastructure was extensive. One national aid worker and two community assistants were killed during the course of the hostilities. Humanitarian compounds and centres were also systematically looted and/or destroyed during the Sudanese Armed Forces and militia attacks. By the end of March, thousands of individuals had

returned to their places of origin, especially in Abu Suruj and Sirba, though many more remain displaced.

14. Humanitarian access remains constrained by insecurity, restrictions created by the parties to the conflict and subsequent limitations on the use of air assets. The severe restrictions on humanitarian access to the civilian population in the northern corridor of Western Darfur for the first 40 days of the year was particularly damaging to humanitarian operations and had an extremely negative impact on civilians in the area, who depend on assistance provided by humanitarian organizations. At present, thousands of civilians along the border with Chad remain in a very vulnerable state, largely out of reach of the humanitarian community. Access to other areas in Western Darfur has also been seriously hampered by the presence of Chadian opposition forces in Darfur and by the cross-border conflict. In a positive development, Government restrictions on humanitarian access to rebel-held areas around Kutum in Northern Darfur, imposed in December 2007, were lifted in mid-January, allowing for the resumption of food distributions to 140,000 conflict-affected people in the area.

15. In addition, rebel movements also undertook military operations during the reporting period. On 7 January, *JEM* attacked the Seref Jidad police station in Western Darfur, forcing Sudanese police personnel to withdraw from the village. In Northern Darfur, a suspected SLM/A/Minni Minawi splinter group attacked a police station in Kilemando in late January, killing two police officers and one civilian (an inmate in the police station cell). In Western Darfur, members of the Movement of Popular Forces for Rights and Democracy, an armed group claiming to be vested with law enforcement authority by virtue of an agreement signed with the State authority, continued its systematic abuse of the rights of the people of Masteri.

16. Elsewhere in Darfur, fighting between the parties, as well as continuing intertribal conflict, continued to trigger significant population displacements throughout the first three months of 2008. Thus far this year more than 90,000 people have been newly displaced across Darfur. Al Salaam camp in Southern Darfur was closed to new arrivals by the Government in February, following an increase in the camp's population to 50,000, up from 37,000 in October 2007. Furthermore, reports indicate that families affected by food shortages are being drawn to camps for internally displaced persons, in the hope of being provided assistance, resulting in further overcrowding and a deterioration of the conditions. Recently concluded post-harvest assessments in Darfur indicate that cereal production is significantly lower than it was last season, raising concerns that food assistance to conflict-affected residents must start earlier than planned.

17. On 22 January, the Government approved the extension of the moratorium on restrictions on humanitarian operations in Darfur until 31 January 2009. In its statement, the Government clearly endorsed the terms and spirit of the 2007 joint communiqué, unequivocally calling for the facilitation of humanitarian operations in Darfur. In view of the late extension of the moratorium, the Humanitarian Affairs Commission of the Sudan also granted a one-month grace period to allow non-governmental organizations time to extend their permits in Khartoum. The High-level Committee and its Tripartite Joint Technical Committee convened on a regular basis to continue to closely follow up the implementation of the joint communiqué.

18. Humanitarian operations in Darfur also continue to be constrained by targeted attacks against humanitarian workers and their assets. During the reporting period, 73 vehicles were hijacked, including 3 UNAMID vehicles and 45 trucks contracted by the World Food Programme (WFP). Twenty-three of the drivers whose trucks were hijacked are still missing. During the reporting period, 18 humanitarian facilities were broken into by armed persons, including four humanitarian compounds that were systematically looted and destroyed during the military offensive by the Sudanese Armed Forces in Western Darfur.

19. Despite the efforts of humanitarian actors, in many areas of Darfur malnutrition among children under 5 years of age remains well above the emergency threshold of 15 per cent of the population.

20. As a result of the insecurity and attacks that seem to be targeting humanitarian workers, WFP faced increasing challenges in the delivery of food aid in Darfur at a time when all agencies are moving to pre-position relief assistance ahead of the rainy season. In February 2008, WFP assisted nearly 2.1 million people in Darfur.

IV. Human rights situation

21. The recent military campaign by the Government of the Sudan to drive out non-signatory factions from Western Darfur has resulted in indiscriminate killings and other grave human rights abuses against civilians. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Sudan visited the village of Abu Suruj on 5 March and received reports about the serious human rights violations committed during the attacks. She has called for an immediate investigation to identify and bring to justice those responsible for the attacks.

22. In addition, the incidence of sexual and gender-based violence in and around camps for internally displaced persons remained high during the reporting period. In January alone, at least eight female internally displaced persons, including a 12-year-old girl, were raped in four separate incidents in Southern Darfur. In Western Darfur, three female internally displaced persons were reportedly raped in front of their relatives in separate incidents in late February. In Zalingei, a 15-year-old girl from the Hassa Hissa camp was beaten and raped by an armed man, and in Gereida, Southern Darfur, a 13-year-old internally displaced person was raped by an armed man when she went out to collect firewood. In a single incident in the village of Thur, Western Darfur, more than 20 women reported that they had been sexually assaulted by the police and other Government security personnel during a search for suspected bandits in early January.

23. During the reporting period, the Movement of Popular Forces for Rights and Democracy subjected many residents of Masteri, in Western Darfur, to illegal detention, torture and ill-treatment on suspicion of having broken the law. At the same time, some former members who had defected from the group were reported to have been captured and summarily executed.

24. On a positive note, the Governor of Northern Darfur announced an immediate ban on female genital circumcision in the State at a ceremony to mark this year's International Women's Day. He called on the State legislature to enact a law in support of the ban.

V. Deployment of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur

25. With regard to the ongoing deployment of UNAMID, paragraph 5 of Security Council resolution 1769 (2007) contains a requirement that, no later than 31 December 2007, UNAMID should assume authority from AMIS with a view to achieving full operational capability and force strength as soon as possible. In accordance with that requirement, UNAMID assumed authority from AMIS on 31 December. While some steps have been taken towards increasing the operational capability and force strength, the deployment of troops in Darfur has been hampered by the deterioration of the security situation and associated requirements to adapt the military concept of operations, logistical challenges, the readiness to deploy of many troop-contributing countries, ongoing discussions with the Government on force composition and continuing bureaucratic impediments imposed by the Government.

26. As at 26 March, the total strength of UNAMID was approximately 10,600 personnel. That figure included some 9,200 uniformed personnel, comprising approximately 7,500 military personnel, 1,600 police officers and one formed police unit, and some 1,400 civilians.

27. In the first quarter of 2008, the only additional deployments to UNAMID were by the advance party of the multi-role engineer company from China and the formed police unit from Bangladesh. The main body of the Chinese engineer company and its equipment are expected to arrive in Darfur in April.

28. A multi-role engineer company, a medium transport unit and a signals company from Egypt, scheduled to deploy earlier as a part of the heavy support package to AMIS, started deploying in March with the arrival of their equipment. While a portion of the equipment has arrived in Darfur, much of it has yet to leave Port Sudan. The personnel of the three companies are expected to arrive in April 2008. The equipment and vehicles of the Bangladesh multi-role logistics company and Nigerian level II hospital have also arrived in the Sudan and are expected to reach Nyala and El Geneina, respectively, in April, with their personnel following in May 2008.

29. In the meantime, given the rapidly changing security environment, particularly in Western Darfur, as well as the need to ensure the presence of the UNAMID force both in Government- and in movement-held areas, the Force Commander has undertaken a tactical review of deployment locations and troop-contributing country distribution throughout Darfur. On that basis, the Force Commander has concluded that a limited redistribution of some troop contributors to different locations within Darfur would be of significant benefit to the force's objectives, maximize the use of the limited resources currently at its disposal and strengthen the mission's hand in its efforts to implement resolution 1769 (2007).

30. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations has initiated discussions with certain UNAMID troop contributors in order to discuss their willingness to consider deploying to locations other than those initially envisioned. While such redistribution will likely result in some delays in deployment for a limited number of troop-contributing countries, this undertaking will ultimately have a significant positive impact at both the tactical and strategic levels.

31. As the deployment of units from the heavy support package is taken forward, another short-term priority will be the deployment of the first two UNAMID battalions from Egypt and Ethiopia. The advance-party personnel of the Egyptian battalion is expected to arrive in April, and the main body in May 2008. That will provide an important operational impetus for UNAMID, as it will be the first significant increase in the force's infantry capability since the transfer of authority on 31 December 2007.

32. The equipment and personnel of the advance party of the Ethiopian infantry battalion is expected to be flown into El Fasher in April. It is anticipated that the main body's equipment will arrive in the Sudan in April and in Darfur in early May, with the personnel arriving in May 2008. The Ethiopian battalion will deploy with an Ethiopian multi-role logistics unit, a transport company and an infantry reconnaissance company.

33. As indicated in the previous 30-day report, I discussed the deployment of UNAMID with the President of the Sudan, Omer Hassan Al-Bashir, in Dakar on the margins of the Organization of the Islamic Conference summit early in March. During our meeting, we agreed that UNAMID would accept one additional battalion from Egypt and another from Ethiopia, following which we would expedite the deployment of the Thai and Nepalese units.

34. The Force Commander has also made clear the priority importance of bringing the existing 10 UNAMID battalions up to United Nations standards in terms of troop numbers and self-sustainment capability. While the troop-contributing countries are able to generate the required number of troops, many are finding it difficult to procure the necessary equipment. Donor nations have volunteered to provide the equipment, training and sustainment needed to raise the battalions to the appropriate standard, in particular in terms of increasing their capacity to undertake extended patrols. It is imperative that those battalions arrive in Darfur adequately trained and fully self-sustaining in order to add value without overtaxing the mission's support capabilities.

35. The force continues to lack a number of critical capabilities: three medium utility helicopter units, one aerial reconnaissance unit, one medium transport unit, one heavy transport unit and one multi-role logistics unit. Pre-deployment preparations are under way for the light tactical helicopters offered by Ethiopia. However, that pledge did not fully meet the requirement, and an additional four light tactical helicopters are still being sought. Such helicopters are essential given their ability to provide force protection and act as a deterrent. Aerial reconnaissance capability is crucial in order to perform surveillance and to monitor and verify events on the ground. Military engineers play a critical role in the expansion of UNAMID camps, particularly in the more remote areas, and in maintaining main supply routes. The logistics and transport units are necessary for sustaining the force in the extremely challenging operating environment of Darfur.

36. On the ground, the primary challenges for the UNAMID military component are to ensure the self-sustainment capabilities of former AMIS and incoming troops; to put in place a robust logistic resupply process and maintenance system; to increase operational output with asset resources; to improve administrative procedures so as to ensure that troops are properly supported; to build on the established liaison arrangements at all levels with the Government, the Sudanese Armed Forces and all the movements so as to formalize this through the Ceasefire

Commission; and to obtain land, build a number of new bases and expand most of the existing ones to accommodate and support half a battalion with supporting elements (including, in some cases, UNAMID formed police units) and civilians per location. With respect to the mission's consultations with the Government to obtain the land that it requires, it has been provided land in El Geneina on which it will build a supercamp for the Western Darfur sector. However, to date the mission still has not received land in Seleia, in the northern corridor of the State. It is critical that the mission obtain that piece of land as quickly as possible in order for UNAMID to be able to adequately respond to the evolving situation in the area.

37. Reconnaissance visits to Darfur by formed police units have been conducted by Egypt, Indonesia, Nepal, Nigeria and Senegal. Pre-deployment visits to inspect units from Egypt, Indonesia and Nepal have taken place, and additional visits are planned to Nigeria and Senegal in April. The equipment of the Nepalese formed police unit arrived in Port Sudan on 18 February, and the unit's main body will deploy once the equipment arrives in Nyala. It is estimated that five formed police units will be deployed in Darfur by the end of July 2008.

38. While the Government has agreed in principle to the right of UNAMID to conduct night flights, it continues to obstruct the mission's operations by restricting flying hours. The Government has said that the airports do not have sufficient capacity for night flights and has therefore indicated that UNAMID must conduct limited night flying. In that regard, the survey and technical drawings for the planned development by the United Nations of airfields in El Fasher, Nyala and El Geneina were completed during the reporting period, and plans are ongoing to begin that development soon. However, in the meantime, it is important that UNAMID be permitted to conduct night flights, which are critical to its operations.

39. Regarding the construction and servicing of UNAMID sites, all task orders were submitted to the contractor on 15 March 2008. The task orders include construction projects in Nyala, El Fasher, El Geneina and Zalingei. They also include construction of a level 1 hospital, a level 3 hospital and medical warehouse, supercamps and 1,250- and 200-person transit camps as well as electrical power installation for the camps.

VI. Financial arrangements

40. The General Assembly, by its resolution 62/232, authorized the establishment of a special account for UNAMID and appropriated the amount of $1,275.7 million for the period from 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008, equivalent to $106.3 million per month, for its establishment.

41. As at 28 March 2008, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNAMID amounted to $708.1 million. As at 31 December 2007, the total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations amounted to $2,536.4 million.

42. In accordance with paragraph 5 (a) of Security Council resolution 1769 (2007), reimbursement of troop-contributing Governments for troop costs associated with contingent personnel deployed to the African Union Mission in the Sudan for the period from 1 October to 31 December 2007 was made at the end of March 2008.

VII. Political process

43. Following the launching of the Darfur peace talks in October 2007, continuing efforts are being made to encourage the parties to start substantive negotiations under the auspices of the African Union and United Nations Special Envoys. Some progress has been made since December 2007, especially towards the unification of the non-signatory movements. However, further progress has been impeded by the deterioration of the security situation, the absence of trust among the parties, renewed instability in the region, and, ultimately, the lack of political will to cease hostilities and come to the negotiating table in good faith.

44. Since the Sirte talks, the Darfurian non-signatory movements have coalesced around five major groupings: SLM/A-Unity, SLM/A-Abdul Wahid, SLM/A-Abdul Shafie, JEM-Khalil Ibrahim and the United Resistance Front (URF) — an alliance of five groups established in Juba in December. In mid-December, following the conclusion of the meeting of non-signatory movements under the auspices of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), the mediation facilitated the return of many movement representatives from Juba to Darfur for further discussions in the field. URF conducted an internal conference in the field and agreed on a political and military structure, which will soon be announced formally in Juba. Also in December, SLM/A-Unity announced the structure of its executive body.

45. Despite those developments and the ongoing discussions among groups, only limited progress has been made towards further unification and coordination, owing partly to unresolved leadership issues and partly to the fighting in Western Darfur. The Special Envoys, Salim Ahmed Salim and Jan Eliasson, have encouraged the movements to focus on the goal of unifying their positions and nominating a negotiation team.

46. In January 2008, the Special Envoys conducted a week-long visit to Darfur, during which they consulted with representatives of the movements on the possibility of holding an Arusha-style meeting and the start of substantive talks. During the visit, both URF and SLM/A-Unity expressed their willingness to attend such a meeting and to enter into substantive talks. As SLM/A-Unity had not attended the opening of the talks in Sirte, that development was a significant step forward.

47. However, the other three groups are not yet willing to participate in such a meeting or proceed to substantive talks. Notwithstanding the constructive discussions between Special Envoy Eliasson and Abdul Wahid in Paris in February and in Geneva on 18 March, the latter's movement continues to assert that an improvement in the security situation is a precondition for negotiations. JEM leader, Khalil Ibrahim, recognizes the importance of a political process, but the movement insists that only JEM and SLM/A should be represented at the talks. SLM/A-Abdul Shafie has expressed reservations regarding the format, venue and timing of the talks. In that context, there is not yet a critical mass of non-signatory movements ready to proceed to substantive negotiations or to attend a meeting similar to that held in Arusha in August 2007.

48. The deterioration of the situation in Chad and the actions of opposition groups reportedly supported by the Governments of Chad and the Sudan have increased tensions between the two countries and undermined regional support for the peace process. On 13 March, the Governments of Chad and of the Sudan signed an

agreement in Dakar in which they committed to normalizing their bilateral relations. The effectiveness of the Dakar Agreement will be gauged by events on the ground. In the coming months, a serious resolve to restore peace and stability along the common border will be vital for the peace process.

49. The Government has continually stated its readiness to engage in substantive negotiations at any time. In that regard, the resolution of the crisis between the National Congress Party and the SPLM in January 2008 was a positive step. However, uncertainty remains regarding the participation and role of Minni Minawi's SLM/A in the political process, which will be important for a unified Darfur strategy in the Government of National Unity.

50. In those circumstances, and although the objective remains to convene formal substantive talks as soon as possible, the Special Envoys believe that there is a need to adjust the approach defined in the 2007 road map. Consultations with the parties are ongoing to determine the way forward, including a forthcoming meeting between the Special Envoys and Khalil Ibrahim: security constraints had impeded the convening of such a meeting in recent months. Efforts are also under way to expedite the recruitment of a joint African Union-United Nations Chief Mediator to engage with the parties on a continual basis.

51. On 17 and 18 March, the Special Envoys convened informal consultations with international and regional partners in Geneva. The meeting provided an opportunity for key stakeholders to assess the situation, work towards a common understanding on the road ahead and harness international leverage in the quest for a solution to the conflict. Participants agreed that the amelioration of the security situation was the paramount priority and that every effort must be undertaken to that end. The Special Envoys, in consultation with UNAMID senior leadership, are engaging the parties on that issue and hope to find ways to bring them together for discussions on committing to a cessation of hostilities and to the protection of civilians. That will be an initial step — the recognition that agreement on security arrangements will be part of a broader political solution.

52. In the meantime, efforts are intensifying to harness the views of civil society organizations, internally displaced persons and traditional leaders for the benefit of the peace process, through the UNAMID Civil Affairs Unit and the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation. The purpose is not only to select representatives for indirect participation in the talks but also to engage those constituencies on substantive issues — a long-term process that will likely extend beyond the negotiations. There are challenges involved, in particular the need to secure the support of the parties for civil society involvement in the peace process.

VIII. Implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement

53. Implementation requirements under the Darfur Peace Agreement have been largely disregarded by all parties on the ground and hampered by the lack of support for the Agreement's mechanisms by non-signatories. Violations of its ceasefire agreements occur on a daily basis, yet the Ceasefire Commission is unable to formally investigate such incidents, as its role, structure and terms of reference have not been agreed to by the Joint Commission.

54. While not fully representative, the first meeting since the transfer of authority was conducted by the Commission on 29 February, chaired by the Deputy Force Commander of UNAMID and attended by members of the Government of the Sudan, JEM Peace Wing, SLM/A-Minni Minawi, and SLM/A-Non-signatory factions. During the meeting, UNAMID requested that the parties appoint two representatives for each of the three sectors of Darfur as well as one representative for the headquarters in El Fasher.

55. During the reporting period, the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation secretariat organized numerous engagements with stakeholders of Darfur society in order to promote the Dialogue's fundamental principles — inclusiveness, autonomy and a grass-roots approach. The Dialogue also sought the views of the Darfurian diaspora on the issues of reconciliation, development, administration, identity, democracy and compensation.

IX. Observations and recommendations

56. I am extremely disappointed at the lack of progress on all fronts in the efforts to address the situation in Darfur. The parties appear determined to pursue a military solution; the political process stalled; the deployment of UNAMID is progressing very slowly and continues to face many challenges; and the humanitarian situation is not improving. The primary obstacle is the lack of political will among all the parties to pursue a peaceful solution to the Darfur crisis. If both sides had mustered the necessary will and agreed to cease hostilities, to cooperate with the deployment of UNAMID, to work sincerely with the Special Envoys towards launching the substantive negotiations and to commit to the protection of civilians, we would by now have started to witness significant progress towards a lasting solution.

57. The implications of the current security situation for the people of Darfur are grave. Violence in Western Darfur during the reporting period has significantly impaired the humanitarian community's ability to provide the civilian population with the critical assistance they require and has increased the vulnerability of thousands of civilians. Additionally, the ongoing attacks on food convoys throughout Darfur have hampered the capacity of agencies on the ground to provide food aid to the population. Reports of a build-up of forces on the Chad-Sudan border during the reporting period offer a deeply troubling sign that the violence and instability will continue, to the detriment of the civilian populations on both sides of the border and in clear violation of the Ceasefire Agreement.

58. UNAMID continues to work towards the full implementation of its mandate and has increased its capacity and visibility with the limited personnel and resources currently at its disposal. It is critical that the international community recognize its own central role in supporting the mission, so as to enable it to effectively implement its mandate and contribute to improving the lives of the civilians of Darfur. In that respect, more must be done to secure the necessary aviation and logistical capacities for a full and effective deployment. Creative solutions must be found for those shortfalls, and they must be found quickly. I call once again on Member States to pledge the necessary capabilities for UNAMID or to prevail upon others who may be in a position to do so.

59. Tensions between Chad and the Sudan during the reporting period have increasingly demonstrated the regional dimensions of the conflict and the

devastating impact that it could have on civilians and peacekeepers on both sides of the border. In that context, a disturbing incident occurred on 3 March, when a European Union-led peacekeeping force (EUFOR) vehicle mistakenly crossed from Chad into the Sudan (Western Darfur) and was fired on by the Sudanese Armed Forces. During the exchange of fire that ensued, one French soldier was killed and another injured. That incident is deeply troubling for the missions on both sides of the Chad-Sudan border, and I strongly urge all parties to exercise the utmost restraint. In that regard, I welcome the agreement reached on 13 March 2008 in Dakar between the President of Chad, Idriss Deby, and President Al-Bashir, in which they agreed to normalize relations and work to prevent further violence. However, the letter dated 27 March 2008 from the Permanent Representative of the Sudan addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2008/212), which alleges that Chad has already violated the Dakar Agreement, is a worrying signal of the climate of mistrust between the two countries. Too many agreements between Chad and the Sudan have gone unimplemented, and I call on both States to take definitive steps to normalize their relations and ensure the full and expeditious implementation of the Dakar Agreement.

60. The signing of the status-of-forces agreement between UNAMID and the Government of the Sudan on 9 February was a positive step in the relations between the Government and the mission. However, the fact that UNAMID has not been afforded complete freedom of movement, particularly in areas affected by the ongoing violence in Western Darfur, demonstrates the need for all parties, including the Government and JEM, to cooperate fully with UNAMID and respect the provisions of the agreement both in letter and in spirit.

61. Despite the Government's declared commitment to a political solution, and its unilateral declaration of a cessation of hostilities and its readiness for peace talks, its recent military actions in Western Darfur and the widespread use of force against civilians in the region are fundamentally at odds with the creation of the environment of trust necessary to initiate meaningful dialogue. JEM must also be held accountable for the role it has played in creating those circumstances.

62. The use of military force by the parties has overshadowed the political process and created an environment in which the prospect of negotiations has become ever more remote. In addition to the undue suffering that such fighting creates for the civilian population, the ongoing violence sends a strong signal that the parties are not ready to end the conflict through dialogue. I therefore call on all parties to urgently commit to a cessation of hostilities and to meaningfully engage in the political process led by the Special Envoys.

63. In conclusion, I wish to express my gratitude to all United Nations personnel and humanitarian actors working in Darfur. I also wish to thank Member States, including donor and troop-contributing countries, for their determined support for the deployment of UNAMID and for efforts to encourage the parties to return to the path of negotiations.